

From: Emma-Louise Elsey [REDACTED]

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To: information@islandstrust.bc.ca

Cc: pluckham@islandstrust.bc.ca, lpatrick@islandstrust.bc.ca, Pgrove@islandstrust.bc.ca, [REDACTED]

Subject: Concerns about the "What We Heard Islands 2050" Report

To whom it may concern,

I attach a letter with my concerns about the *What We Heard Islands 2050: The Future of the Trust Area* report, published in late July – which will be used to inform the policy and direction of the Islands Trust as we head towards 2050.

I have a number of concerns – in particular I am dismayed by the low engagement and lack of demographic information in this report. It feels like the voices heard are those of privilege – of education, wealth and time.

I do not feel represented by this report.

I also believe the questions asked are “leading questions”, framing all concerns as climate change issues - which leads to issues like affordable housing being de-prioritised.

I will also be cc'ing our MLA, Adam Olsen, affordable housing advocates and local news sources.

Please see the attached letter for my detailed concerns.

Thank-you for your attention in this matter.

Emma-Louise Elsey

Certified Professional Coach, BSc (Hons), PracNLP

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Dear Islands Trust Council Members,

On July 20 the Islands Trust Council shared a News Release announcing the release of a report which summarises the input received from engagement with people in the trust area. As you know, this report titled “What we Heard” will be used to revise the Islands Trust Policy Statement, and determine the future direction - and priorities - of The Islands Trust.

It is a beautiful report, with icons, easy to follow and read.

But as I read this (extremely easy to read, accessible and informative summary) document I became increasingly alarmed by the contents - on a number of levels.

Please note that consultation with the 28,000 Coast Salish Peoples will happen separately, so this letter refers to the *non*-Coast Salish Peoples of which I am a part.

Here are my 5 main issues I have with the report and why I was so upset:

1) Extensive engagement?

The Press Release says it was “an extensive public engagement process to inform planning and policy for the next 30 years.”

I was upset and dismayed when I read the report because *I do not feel represented*. And I’m not alone. 94% of the residents you serve are not represented in this report. And if you include the non-resident property owners this goes up to 95.5%.

I’m not sure what’s normally considered extensive, but numbers like “552 people attending open houses”, “132 people talked with us on ferries” and “789 people participated on Thought Exchange” are a very small percentage of the 26,000 people you serve.

But in addition to the small sample of people surveyed, whose views are represented here?

There is nothing at all to suggest that a broad selection of our residents have been engaged with. I find this particularly disturbing because this means that we have no ideas *whose* views you have collected.

Without an understanding of the demographics of the people engaged with, how can you know whose opinions you’re hearing?

For example, what were these people’s ages, income/financial situation, marital status, family size and education levels? Do they rent, own or have a second home among our islands?

In particular, do we know the priorities of young families? Vulnerable elders? Low paid workers? Independent business owners? Retirees? Single parents? And what has been done to engage with the

young - our teenagers perhaps - who are approaching adulthood? These are the people who will live on the islands 30 years from now.

I do not feel represented by the views in this report.

Whilst I agree with some of the priorities and issues raised I am distressed that important topics like affordable housing and our local economies are not a top priority or concern.

Here are my three biggest concerns right now:

1. **Community Resilience** - including food and water security, ensuring we have a broad range of residents so that necessary jobs are performed, our local and unique cultures and ensuring we are prepared for natural disasters (whether climate change induced or not).
2. **Affordable Housing**. I actually prefer the term "Housing for all" as this would also cover our population who may not even be able to "afford" housing.
3. **Our Local Economies**. Always an issue, with a lot of dependence on tourism and now made worse by COVID. In particular I would love to see policies that encourage information technology workers, remote workers and people who work in the green technology space.

However, out of 17 concerns identified over the next 30 years, "Community Resilience" sits at number 7 on the list behind *two* ecosystem concerns (Ecosystem change and Ecosystem protection). Our Local "Economy and Employment" sits at 13 out of 17 concerns behind Woodsmoke and Climate Change Education. And as mentioned, affordable housing *doesn't even make it to the concerns list*.

In fact of the 17 concerns for the future - and the comments used in the report to illustrate each concern - the environment and climate are mentioned in 16 of them. Which is great. Climate change and taking care of our environment is *incredibly* important for our future. But what about simply taking care of the people in our communities?

2) There is more to our islands than a changing climate

I was surprised that the key question about people's concerns for the next 30 years was PRE-framed for people around climate change.

By asking the question, "*In the context of a changing climate*, what concerns do you have for the next 30 years?" and by placing the climate reference *at the front* of the question, this meant ALL responses had a climate focus.

And what this means is that you haven't heard all of your constituents' concerns, you've just heard the concerns that relate to climate change.

Specifically, "Affordable Housing" did not even make it ONTO the list of people's concerns! This is shocking. The Islands Trust has already declared a climate emergency, and this is extremely important. But there are many other important issues on our islands beyond climate change.

"Preserving and Protecting" goes beyond just our "natural" environment...

The goal of the Islands Trust when it was established in 1974 was to “preserve and protect the trust area and its unique amenities and environment *for the benefit of residents of the trust area and of the province generally...*”

So, not just preserving the environment, but the unique amenities. Not just for the local residents, but for the visitors too (the province generally).

In the Policy Statement (consolidated 2003), Directive Policies 5.8.6 states that “Local trust committees and island municipalities shall, in their official community plans and regulatory bylaws, address their community’s current and projected housing requirements and the long-term needs for educational, institutional, community and health-related facilities and services, as well as the cultural and recreational facilities and services.”

Currently, on Salt Spring Island, there is a dire housing shortage, especially for those who are not wealthy. This includes affordable homes to both buy and rent. If we want an island filled up with wealthy retirees and a lack of amenities because people can’t afford to live and work here, we are headed in the right direction.

3) The wrong tool?

I don’t believe “Thought Exchange” is the right vehicle for population surveying at such a broad level. There are issues with bias, and my experience using Thought Exchange was that it was unstructured and confusing.

On bias: I looked around “Thought Exchange” and saw lots of comments and “likes” around climate and natural ecosystem protection, and very little on other topics that were important to me.

When you have a platform that asks people to “like” each other’s comments, just like Facebook, we create a self-reinforcing bubble which can be off-putting for people who think differently. As such, I did not feel comfortable contributing in that environment.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, there are no demographics here to inform us of whose opinions we have heard. I wonder why you did not use a survey format - that allows contributors to be anonymous, and allows collection of demographics so that you understand who you’re actually hearing from.

4) How valid is this report given the potential impacts of COVID?

As I read the press release, I was astonished that COVID-19 was not even given a passing mention.

Whilst I understand COVID was not a “thing” when this information was gathered - it sure is one now. COVID-19 has ravaged our local economies, population and businesses (both local and visitor serving businesses alike). It’s going to take a long time for our islands to recover, and we may find that we lose much of our island vitality in the process.

A post-COVID world is going to be challenging for many of our less financially resilient community members. Land use planning for affordable housing needs to be a priority now, more than ever. Our local economy similarly needs a lot of focus and support. And perhaps, in the light of COVID - and a changing climate - we need to think ahead to supporting our farmers and growers more to maximise our local food supply.

I wonder if the concerns - and priorities - in the report would change if people were polled for their views now?

5) Divisive and Confusing Categorisation of Results

I found the grouping of the various inputs received to be unstructured, confusing and also divisive.

Some examples: by lumping together “The Local Economy & Tourism” you have highlighted a lot of unhelpful polarised views about tourism, and lost thoughts on the economy overall. Because while tourism is an important component of many island economies, it is still a subset of our economy - and only one of several economic forces.

Also, did we really need Ecosystem Change *and* Ecosystem Protection as two separate categories? And it’s confusing to call a category Education when it’s really Climate Change Education. I was imagining something else entirely.

In Summary

The *What We Heard Islands 2050: The Future of the Trust Area* report summarises the public’s input and apparently “captures the ideas and thoughts of more than a thousand people from across the islands”.

This “extensive consultation” with just 6% of the islands’ population - performed with no understanding of their income/age/homeowner status, education, ethnicity and more - is simply no consultation at all.

And whilst preserving the natural environment is extremely important, why are we not also preserving and protecting our fellow *humans* too - in their myriad forms and circumstances?

We need to remember that we are a part of nature. As a species, we need to protect and get back in communion with nature and its bounties. And we also need to ensure our community is resilient, preserve our communities’ economies and ensure our young, our elders (and everyone in between) can afford housing.

Specifically, I fear that if the Islands Trust Council uses this *What We Heard Islands 2050: The Future of the Trust Area* report for input to the future direction of policy, affordable housing, our economies and our communities - and whatever other non climate-related concerns other people might have - will simply not be addressed.

I ask again, who *are* the public that was “extensively” engaged with? Whose opinions does this report represent? And I formally request that you go further with your consultation, and specifically include - and widely promote - a survey with demographics so that more people, from all walks of life, are represented.

Yours faithfully,

Emma-Louise Elsey

(Online business owner, avid naturalist, environmentalist and believer that the “Preserve and Protect” mandate should also apply to humans!)